

**From:** Lewis Lydon  
**Sent:** Monday, 29 July 2019 7:16 AM  
**To:** Sterle, Glenn (Senator)  
**Subject:** ARTC INLAND RAIL COMPLAINT BY CONCERNED RESIDENT LEWIS LYDON

**Senator Glenn Sterle**



Senator for Western Australia

<b>Positions</b>	Chair of Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Deputy Chair of Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
<b>Party</b>	Australian Labor Party
<b>Chamber</b>	Senate



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Dear Senator Sterle,

I am writing to you with regard to your role as member of the Senate Estimates Committee overseeing the Inland Rail Project. I have viewed some video footage of your questioning ARTC personnel in one of last year's Senate Estimates sessions and was impressed by your general approach and what I judged to be a dedication to "keep the Baah Studs honest"... It gave me hope that there are in fact some "good guys" still in Australian politics!

I am an impacted landowner in the NSW Narromine to Burroway section of the Inland Rail project, and am now a member of the N2NCCC (Narromine to Narrabri Community Consultative Committee).

The reason I have volunteered for this role is twofold – (1) my property has been included in the current corridor (“preferred study area”) being investigated for the track, so I have a strong vested interest in the process & (2) (more so) I have become horrified and disgusted to see all the old clichés about “dodgy politics” etc. coming to life in front of my eyes and am wanting to “make a difference” if possible, on behalf of myself and my family’s interests as well as that of the wider Narromine Community, of which I have been part for many years.

- Following is a brief history of the facts as I understand them - from some fairly intensive personal investigation since I was made aware that the Inland Rail project may come close to my property...
  - For several years there has been analysis of a Route for the Inland Rail line that would take it **West** of Narromine (aka “Concept corridor”)
  - However, back in December of 2017 the decision was made to switch routes from the well-researched Western corridor to a route **East** of Narromine that is the current study area. This decision was made with minimal consultation of potentially affected landholders.
  - According to ARTC the comparison between the Western and Eastern routes in the MCA (Multiple Criteria Analysis) was a “very close thing” – basically from the point of view of the MCA there was little between them... So the logical question that arose was why suddenly switch from a route that had been studied for years to a much less well studied “backup” if indeed there was very little difference?
  - I had heard various rumours “around town” that some of the “wealthy farmers” whose properties would be impacted by the original Western corridor had exerted pressure to get the route switched. Considering some of these farmers are indeed quite influential (including amongst Narromine Shire Councillors at that time) it made sense, but knowing how “wrong” rumours can often be, and keeping in mind that there may have been some newly discovered technical reason for the switch I kept an open mind.
  - For the 30+ years I have been residing in the Narromine area, I had heard many people comment that the danger to the town of a flooded Macquarie River was “counter intuitively” not from the River breaking its banks along the stretch directly running through the town (which has had strong levee banks since the 1950’s floods) but rather from further upstream (East - towards Dubbo) where it breaks the banks at *Webb Siding*, then runs into the *Backwater Cowal* which then can run into Narromine town from the SE, which has little to no protection from flooding from that direction.
  - However, this is precisely where the Inland Rail route was suddenly switched to from the concept route, (where any flooding doesn’t threaten the Narromine township). Thus it did seem very strange to me that they would contemplate building such a large Railway line through the worst flood prone area with the largest threat to town (& residences & lives thereof)!! There have been several major floods that have threatened the Narromine township since the devastating 1950’s floods. Since that time the Burrendong Dam construction and other flood mitigation steps have been taken such that Narromine Town itself has not been badly flooded since, though it has come close on a few occasions, notably 2011, and the addition of massive potential barrier to water flow that is represented by the Inland Rail line seems “crazy”...

- Well, the next piece of the jigsaw puzzle (the “light bulb going off”) was in mid July 2018 when I attended a meeting at High Park Estate with (i) fellow residents, (ii) ARTC representatives, & (iii) a member of the Minister’s office.

After quite a lot of patient but persistent questioning about the rationale behind the decision to switch routes, the ARTC representatives admitted to us that *the decision was based on “Community Feedback”!!* They wouldn’t share who/how/what precisely this community feedback was, but it certainly tended to confirm what we had heard “on the Grapevine” regarding influence from landholders impacted by the original Western route.

- Then, to add Insult to Injury - following the decision to switch routes, (after the event) apparently they realized that the original Eastern corridor which had been assessed in the MCA wasn’t technically feasible, so shifted the Corridor’s boundaries... This then included the entire *Villeneuve Estate* with its 20 households! Considering the ARTC comments re’ how close the original MCA comparison between the Western and Eastern routes was, simply adding in the extra impact to Villeneuve Estate should surely have swung the balance & committed them to revert to their original Western route!?

As they were not in the original Corridors being assessed, **none** of the residents of Villeneuve were advised or consulted that their properties were anywhere near the "Alternative Study Area" prior to these decisions! These households now find themselves in the middle of the “preferred study area” yet were given no opportunity to have any input in the route selection process and now face massive changes to lifestyle and family investment without opportunity for fair hearing thanks to this poor management.

- So it seems that for the benefit of a few influential farming families we now have a situation where the current planned Inland Railway line will:
  - (i) potentially endanger the residences & lives of Narromine Township through increased flood risk,
  - (ii) Costs \$37 million more than the ‘concept route’ (ARTC’s figures) and no doubt will be much more costly to the NSW Taxpayer in flood damage control/repairs eg. Extensive viaducts to adequately get across the SE floodplain!
  - (iii) Also the fact that the current Corridor will impact the Eastern side of Narromine has more far reaching consequences, as that is the “Dubbo/Sydney” side of town, which naturally experiences much heavier road traffic than the Western roads, so will be more disruptive to daily traffic flows
  - (iv) & this route also is impacting two of the Narromine area’s more “prestigious” subdivisions (High Park Estate and Villeneuve Estate). Having the Inland Rail line running through/past these Estates not only will presumably decrease the value of these blocks, but also repel potential investors/new residents wanting to come to the town...
- It has also become patently obvious that the ARTC staff, including their various project engineers had very little clue regarding important items that are common local knowledge, such as the greatest flood risk from town being from the South East vs. directly from the

River bank in town. Also local knowledge includes warnings about any construction work in major areas within the floodplain due to deep soils that are treacherously soft when inundated. I know myself from 30 years living on my 25 acre block nearby that local soils can indeed be “treacherous”, including needing 3 tractors to pull out a bogged Ute one wet year! ☺

No doubt the costs will keep rising as they keep “discovering” what everyone locally knows, that they could hardly have picked a worse route to put a railway line through! ☹

There has been a very high staff turnover within ARTC which tells its own story but hasn't helped with continuity of information flow by any means. Part of the extensive delay in taking their current analyses to the next step appears to be that their “flood models” have failed to adequately describe reality. Their original data came from a combination of historic Narromine Shire Council records and low definition technology, and only recently have they done more intensive accurate mapping with LiDar etc. technology. They have promised to deliver more information re' (i) their flood modelling & (ii) better defined elevation levels to the next N2NCCC meeting, however there is a very good chance (based on the above factors) that their analysis will reveal (iii) high flood risk requiring (iv) massive overspend to even come near adequate amelioration of the dangers represented by putting a large railway line through the Backwater Cowal floodplain!

- & if it wasn't enough of a concern with flood risk to Town from the South Eastern floodplain, Narromine Council seem hell bent on “upgrading” the existing levee bank along the Macquarie River, which will in effect potentially cause a “Flood Triangle” with Narromine Township in the centre of it and water trapped between Levee bank and Rail line! (see below link and photo with Blue arrows showing potential flow of floodwater from the SE)

My philosophy is that if a solid, accurate and transparently communicated process of analysis determines that the route will go through or near my property, and is the best choice for the local community &/or State &/or country, then “fair enough”, I will support it.

However, considering the facts as I understand them, the whole process has been not only mismanaged from the perspective of fair process, proper consultation and communication with the community and potentially affected landholders, but I believe the completely wrong decision has been made in choice of route which will endanger the Township of Narromine and its residents & for all the wrong reasons...

I would very much appreciate your support in getting to the bottom of this matter. In effect I am asking for what the NSW Farmers have been asking for – an ***Independent (Re) Assessment of the Route Selection Process for the Inland Rail project.***

All the best,

Cheers

Lewis Lydon

<https://www.narromine.nsw.gov.au/residents/narromine-levee-bank-augmentation>



<https://www.narromine.nsw.gov.au/development/flooding>

A lot of uncertainties in this map... Doesn't really account for the fact that the main risk to town of floodwater is from the South East, after the river breaks its banks further East of the maps boundary and then threatens the town from the South East (Backwater Cowal floodplain – see blue arrows)...

